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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that the television industry has made some progress away from its totally white orientation, the industry as a whole still has a long way to go before it can be said to afford fair treatment to blacks. More blacks must gain access to the centers of power--such as the Federal Communications Commission--from which change emanates, and the networks must provide greatly improved opportunities for minority employment in responsible positions. Secondly, television, through its entertainment programing and its function as a new medium, must present a more accurate picture of grassroots black America in order to help blacks build better self-images and to provide whites with a better understanding of blacks. Finally, Congress must begin to use its power, particularly through the authorization of funds for public television, in ways which will encourage attention to the needs and accomplishments of black Americans. (LB)

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THE ATTACHED IS A TRANSCRIPT OF THE BLACK JOURNAL PROGRAM "THE REAL POWER," AN INTERVIEW WITH BENJAMIN L. HOOKS, THE FIRST BLACK TO BE APPOINTED A MEMBER OF THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION.

AIR DATE: Tuesday, January 30, at 9:30 p.m.

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Benjamin L. Hooks was appointed a member of the Federal Communications Commission in July, 1972, and thus became the first black commissioner in the 38-year history of the organization. He is a gentle-spoken 47-year-old grandfather, minister, lawyer and former judge and was a long-time associate of Dr. Martin Luther King. Although appointed to the post by President Richard M. Nixon, Hooks claims he is "not an Uncle Tom" and will begin jawboning white network executives to realistically depict the quality of life in black America today. Hooks also believes insignificant amounts of blacks are employed by the television networks. Here are extracts from the interview conducted by Tony Brown, executive producer of BLACK JOURNAL.

On page 1, Commissioner Hooks says that blacks in America will really never wield power unless they are given positions in the government--appointed or elective--where their voices will really count.

On page 3, Commissioner Hooks says of President Nixon: "I think he is entitled like any other politician to be given credit for the things that he has done. There are a lot of firsts in black appointments from Richard Nixon ... If I were an Uncle Tom, if I am an Uncle Tom, it's not Nixon who makes me one because my term is for seven years. Given the facts of American political life, I'll be on the FCC when Brother Nixon is retired."

On page 4, Commissioner Hooks charges America's white press never reports on anything that "I say or do unless it affects

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the black issue. But the truth in that is I have a vote on everything that comes now and on a seven-man commission, it is very easy to get a 3-3 shift there." Also on page 4, Commissioner Hooks charges further discrimination by the white media by stating that he has never been invited to be interviewed on one of the commercial national news shows, except for an interview on NBC's "Today Show."

On page 5, Commissioner Hooks charges "the networks of simply not being concerned" with grassroots black America and on the same page charges the networks have failed to portray the black man for his own benefits so he can have a positive self-image.

On page 6, Commissioner Hooks charges that the white community--dependent upon television for its daily diet--has been presented with an unfair and distorted view of black America by the networks. He adds that many whites are "fearful and afraid" because the blacks they see on television fail to really "give a fully dimensional black character." He adds that he will tell white network executives that they have been wrong in their portrayal of black America, and says: "I think television has a long way to go and as long as I'm on the Commission, I will be jawboning about it."

On page 7, Commissioner Hooks calls for the creation of a black program on a commercial network that would be helpful for blacks understanding blacks and whites understanding blacks.

On page 9, Commissioner Hooks responds to remarks made recently by Clay Whitehead, who heads the White House office of telecommunications. Says Hooks: "I have no great fear that any agency is going to be taken over by a President" and raps broadcasting executives for being afraid of Whitehead and the White House. Says Commissioner Hooks: "Broadcasters don't have any intestinal fortitude. They're not willing to fight for what they consider their rights. I couldn't be concerned about it. I think that life is a struggle that you survive through trying to protect the interests that you think are paramount."

On page 10, Commissioner Hooks accuses the Congress, and not President Nixon, for the current financing crisis that public television is now facing. He charges that Congress refused to approve funding for public television on a permanent basis because "no one wants to cut loose the purse strings."

BROWN: Our guest on this edition of BLACK JOURNAL is Benjamin L. Hooks, the first and only black member of the Federal Communications Commission. The Federal Communications Commission regulates all television and radio stations. Judge Hooks, Reverend Hooks, Commissioner Hooks -- our guest has a very varied background and has a varied experience in all of these areas. Mr. Commissioner, I'd like to welcome you to BLACK JOURNAL, and as you know, the title of this program is "The Real Power." And before the camera went on, one of the things I was discussing with you was that we would like for you to tell us, being at the absolute center of power -- not black power, not white power, but power -- just what is it like to sit on the commission?

HOCKS: Well, during the days that I worked with Dr. King and, as you know and many people don't know it, I worked with him personally over a period of years. I used to remember a definition he used of power. It is ability to effect change. Now that's what power is. Classically in physics, in sociology, in political science, whatever, it is the ability to effect change. And when black people really zero in on what black power is -- It may or may not be rhetoric. It may or may not be philosophy. Whatever it is that effects change and the existing condition of things is power. In Washington today, there are several very powerful regulatory agencies: Federal Power Commission, Federal Aviation Authority, Civil Aeronautics Board, Interstate Commerce Commission, and I could name others -- but I suppose at least fifty people who sit on those commissions. They usually have rotating terms and the President usually appoints at least, on the average per commission a year. So you look back over the last 12 years. There have probably been six other appointments to these commissions. The question is, why aren't black people on those commissions? If we don't understand where power is, we don't go for it. We get, you know, all wrapped up in the trappings of power, the ceremonial aspects of it -- the taking of the bows and the riding on the campaign train and having our pictures taken with prominent and charismatic white people. And we just don't understand what power is. Until we begin to focus in on that, until we demand of both political parties and black leaders in both parties that they really put black folk in positions where they really count, then we'll never really know what power is. Let me just hurry and make one example. When I came to the Federal Communications Commission after 1972, it had about 1600 employees. The Federal Communications record for minority hiring -- women, Spanish surnamed and black -- was as dismal as all other Washington agencies.

There has been a real effort made to change that picture. There were two black lawyers when I came on board. Today we have seven. We have sent our contracts to another ten and they will be on when law school graduates get out in June of this year. Which means we'll move from two to 17. Now that same type of thing is taking place among our engineering staff and in the real centers of power. Now if you were to think in terms of a black man and it doesn't make much difference what his name is so you know he is committed to the idea that black folk have got to move from where they are now. And put them in all these agencies, you have a similar situation that is happening, not only in terms of the agency itself, but into the things we regulate. We regulate radio and TV, as you've said, but we've also set the rates for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, which alone employs over one million people. The largest single industry in the world today. And we have to do it with equal employment opportunities. Since I've been in the FCC, we've hired an Equal Opportunity Officer to work with the agency itself. And we've established by commission resolution an equal employment opportunity office to deal with all of the things we regulate: radio, TV, domestic and international satellites, cable TV, telephones and all that type of thing. I guess I should hurry and say that this hasn't been accomplished by me singlehandedly. I've had the support and cooperation of the full Commission for all of these votes and all of this that we've done this by has been by the unanimous vote of the Commission. So I simply say that if we really want to set change in the life of America in trucking companies, in aviation lines, in thousands of people who are hired and regulated by these agencies, we've got to move to get black people on these agencies who, by their very presence, will open up opportunities for other black people.

BROWN: Mr. Commissioner, you were appointed by a President who is not that popular among black people. I think it is fair to say that many blacks suspected that you might turn out to be an Uncle Tom. Quite to the contrary, you have advocated that you first of all were concerned about the plight of the American black people which has, I might say, surprised quite a few people.

HOOKS: Well, one of the things I think we tend to lump people into categories too often. Now I'm the first to admit that quite often when black people, either by virtue of their academic training become rich or when they get so-called superstatus, that too often black folk have forgotten, you know, the pain and agony of other members of our racial group, the

brothers and sisters who are still back in the pain and sweat of the ghetto. We'd have to be very frank that that does happen all too often that we tend to forget. We tend to become all wrapped up in the good life and the cocktail circuit and the drama and excitement, and we forget. But it is the people who know my background, who know how long I've been in the civil rights struggle -- since 1949, first with the NAACP and then with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, other groups, working in campaigns -- and, you know, it stands to reason that the white people who appointed me knew my background. They weren't fools. It may have to do with sometimes we expect less from people and we put them in a certain slot and then no matter what they do they can't come out. But I certainly am not one of those who will sit here and say that President Nixon is the best President black folks have ever had. On the other hand, I think he is entitled, like any other politician, to be given credit for the things that he has done. There are a lot of firsts in black appointments from Richard Nixon. Now if the people who have those appointments don't do a good job, you shouldn't blame the President; you should blame the man who is in there. If I were an Uncle Tom, if I am an Uncle Tom, it's not Nixon who makes me one because my term is for seven years. Given the facts of American political life, I'll be on FCC when Brother Nixon is retired. After eight years, I mean -- he only has four more years. Now, there is no reason for me to cater to him, and since I've been in office nobody has in any way attempted to influence any way I've voted. I've had a free hand. If I've done badly or poorly, it isn't because somebody has been pulling the strings. Most presidential appointments, if they are presidential appointments for an unfixed term where you can be called to submit a resignation there may be a little stringpulling, but on these regulatory agencies, they are really arms of Congress. You're appointed by the President. You have to be approved by the Senate. And you have a definite term. And if you do a job, you know it doesn't matter what you say in terms of militancy or non-militancy. If you do your job, if you're not caught in illegality, you know you'll be there for the rest of your term. So that President Nixon was -- I want to make this clear also, that the appointment by President Nixon didn't happen in the back and it came about because for a period of time there were a number of black people who were in tune with the communications industry. They recognized how powerful the commission was and they began to bring unceasing pressure. I still happen to believe that, so far as

black folk are concerned, whatever we get, we're going to have to struggle for. And I say, fight for it. And I'm not talking necessarily about with pistols and clubs, but I'm talking in terms of the classic American political struggle. You vote, you lobby, you pressure, you raise the devil, and you kick up a fuss, and you keep arguing until the appointed powers do something that ought to be done. I don't think that the time has come in this country when black folk are going to be handed their freedom on flowers or the bees. We're going to have to still struggle for it.

BROWN: You are in a situation, I understand, where you are what's commonly called on the seven-man commission, you are called the swing vote.

HOOKS: Yes, that's the other thing about power. First of all, I'm a Commissioner and I have a vote on everything that comes up there. Not just black issues. It is -- I don't worry about it, and it makes it rather unfortunate that I have a one-dimensional character, because the public press never reports anything I say or do unless it affects the black issue. But the truth in that is, I have a vote on everything that comes. Now, on a seven-man commission, it is very easy to get a 3-3 shift there, and at that point the seventh vote becomes all-important. Being the junior member of the Commission, I also happen to vote last and that makes a great deal of difference.

BROWN: Mr. Commissioner, have you ever been invited to be on one of the major commercial national news shows?

HOOKS: No, I have not. Except for the TODAY show. I was on that. I made an appearance on that. But the other major shows in America, I have not been invited to.

BROWN: I ask the question because many of us are concerned. We say that television, to a very great extent, does not reflect the total black community or that we have problems with programming. I read a statement that you made at one time, that many kinds or categories of blacks in the black community -- I think you said doctors, dentists, judges, etc. -- are left out. These are people I think, I would certainly think that you have to be in that category. Isn't it kind of startling to you that a black man, or a man as

powerful in America as you are -- You help regulate the very industry that the networks make fortunes out of, the local stations -- that you have not been invited to appear on a national news program?

HOOKS: Well, it is not a surprise to me, given the nature and the character of American life. First of all, we have to admit there is a lot of racism in this country. The reason I don't talk about racism too much is because I think it simplifies the issue too much. It is really more the fight between what you might call the have and the have nots. And unfortunately for black folk we are primarily in the have not class. Now when-- Someone wrote a book called THE INVISIBLE MAN. And somebody else wrote a book called THE SPOOK THAT SAT BY THE DOOR. The hard fact of American life is that the American white public, by and large, is insensitive to black folks in this country. The intellectual, the philosophical, the academic, the legal, the judicial community of this country gets very little exposure. Because when you do that, you are putting ideas out there on that tube. I'm quite often misunderstood, and I want to take a moment and try to explain this. Many black movie stars, athletes and singers are exposed very well on television. And I'm all in favor of that. I think they deserve all of the time they get, and more. They are intelligent, articulate human beings who paid their dues. But that is not the totality of black life. Now white television people know that. They are constantly parading senators and congressmen and presidents and ambassadors and all kinds of business people before the larger white community. But with us it seems to be a stopgap, and there are two or three reasons for that. Some of it is not obvious racism. It reflects the fact that in the places where it counts, there are no black people employed. They don't really know that all of these people exist. They don't know how many black federal judges there are. They don't know how many black lawyers and doctors are fighting terrific battles, trying to eliminate the evils of our system. The whole business of this criminal justice system where people go in and 60 per cent of them go back in one year after they are out. They talk about -- Chief Justice Burger on that and that's good. But there are black judges and black lawyers who are equally in tune with this problem and have spent a lifetime trying to study this. They need exposure. I accuse the networks of simply not being concerned either because they don't know or because they don't care. Or they are making no effort. Now until black people get decent jobs, you know, where they influence programming contents,

where they can sit down with editorial boards of those who make up the news. It is great to have all their personalities. I'm all in favor of that. It is great to have black cameramen. But it is more important to have black people behind the scenes. When I go into a town, they will take maybe a 15 minute tape, but then not play but two minutes of it. That's very important. Who edits. Because you can't tell 15 minutes with people shooting questions at you without saying something foolish, you know. And it is very important how to edit that thing, you know. It is very important--that two minutes that they play. It happens all the time. I've watched Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King, agonize over this whole problem as they were interviewed all over the country. Trying to answer the questions coming from a hostile press many times. And yet at the end of that interview, they may take a half hour. Only two minutes is going to be played. What two minutes? Do black people have a chance to edit? Cut the film? Decide? You know what is going to be said? These are the things that are important. And of course the networks take the easy way out. They know these great stars. They put them on. If you say you're not doing anything for blacks, look, so and so last night, but until the totality of black life is portrayed and you know better than I do the kind of report said there were two things about television that you must always remember. Not only have the networks failed to portray the black man for his own benefits so he can have a positive self image, but the Asian Americans, the Spanish named Americans and women can say that, too. Women are underplayed, you know, put into certain roles. Asian Americans are usually a little super intellectual, but have no human emotions. There are various categories, and I say that the networks are trying to break out, but obviously I think they are doing it much too slowly and so because the people who will work for the networks, you know, don't have this information and because their staff don't include the people who could give it to them they just go along their merry way, you know, doing what is easy and obvious. Now I talked about one thing and that is the fact that minorities need positive models that they can govern themselves on. When my little grandson watches a television set, he may not be able to be a singer and athlete, but hopefully he may have enough brains to be a lawyer or a doctor. He needs to see poverty role models. But even more important, in one sense, is the fact that the larger white community is dependent upon television for their daily diet. And nobody has yet been able to measure the influence of this very powerful medium on the mind of that white community who lives in suburbia who has no contact with blacks.

Who are fearful and afraid, you know, like an old maid looking for a man under the bed, because they don't have contact with us physically and what they see on the tube, you know, doesn't really give a fully dimensional black character. So that until we are able to solve that, I think television has a long way to go and as long as I'm on the commission, I will be jawboning about it. I will be talking with network executives. I don't intend to use any power I have as a commissioner in any illegal blackmail fashion. But with all the power of my being I will tell them that I think they are wrong, that they are dead wrong, and try to convince them that they have got to do a better job of portraying the totality of black life in America.

BROWN: I think I'd like to add a footnote. You mentioned the Kerner Commission Report. BLACK JOURNAL was born as a result of the Kerner Commission Report. This was in '68 when the buildings and the cities were burning. Now in 1972, since the climate has become more tranquil, that is the black community is not as manic as it was, we are accused of being separatists because we have a position that says black people have a right to define themselves. Black people have a right to present models and I'd like to ask a question. We on public television ... commercial television still has resisted a black program oriented to black people. Do you feel that this is a good position? Do you feel that a black program on a commercial network would be helpful for blacks understanding blacks and whites understanding blacks?

HOOKS: I most certainly do. You know one of the problems that you always run into is the fact that public affairs generally, you know, get a very low rating. There are a lot of journalists, broadcast journalists, who argue about First Amendment Rights and the fact that they are a protectorate. The truth of the matter is that I think television is primarily an entertainment medium. Therefore whenever you have a talk show or a public affairs show, the ratings go down. My point is that we can't do anything about that, you know, until the public gets better and I'm not arguing about it. I'm not one of those who say that television is all that bad. You know generally on that score. My point is that since the ratings are down anyway, you know, both the blacks and whites the same.

BROWN: Well, I think there is another point and that is that the networks or commercial television makes so much money on singing, dancing and sports that it could afford a loss in the public affairs areas. Now I think you're saying ...

HOOKS: ... public affairs--do black public affairs. And don't argue about the fact that it is not going to get much rating because the other doesn't get much of a rating. The fact of the matter--treat us as equals, not as one on top and one ... not on an up and down position, but across the board. And it seems to me that until we get that and I think this could produce a large white audience if that's what the networks are concerned about. Not--most local stations--in fairness to broadcasting, let me say one good word for them. If I were to travel all over this country, and I quite often do that, most of the television stations have a much better hiring record of minorities than do, let's say, newspapers. Newspapers are not controlled in any way and they should not be. I'm a great believer in First Amendment privileges and I'm not trying to suggest there ought to be. But where there is government supervision, where big brother watches, things happen. I've been to many cities, I won't name them, where the affiliated network station had one or two or three black people, but two daily newspapers had one black staffer between them. You would not think that black people ever got married or had 50th anniversaries or 25th year wedding anniversaries if you were to pick up the society pages of the most liberal papers in this country. And I make a very strenuous effort to look at them. And it's deplorable. It is shameful. It then goes back to the black man being that invisible man in American life. If we keep it now, you know I'm not that hot on society--but I think black folk have as much right to be foolish about a wedding as white people. They want to spend $10,000, you know, glorify them. Let them describe what the black woman was wearing, the gown and the lace and so on.

BROWN: But let me speak to a point that you just raised. You've indirectly raised it several times. You have talked about First Amendment rights. And now you are talking about an area in journalism that is uncovered and in pro ... journalism and you've certainly made some observations about programming areas that could be more vital to blacks and minorities in broadcasts. Is there, in your mind, as some of the editors and publishers and television owners are now saying, is there in your mind some type of governmental conspiracy from the White House using the Federal Communications Commission and the carrot and stick approach? To being punitive toward newspapers and radio and television stations, to get them in line. To philosophize and propagandize the government's position?

HOOKS: Well, of course there has been a great hue and cry. Dr. Whitehead as you know made a speech down in Indianapolis the other day in which he talked about responsibility to local broadcasters. And then he mentioned the fact that there was going to be an Administration bill introduced to lengthen the license period. And this was viewed by the broadcast industry generally--I think according to public reaction--as a stick and a carrot approach. The first thing that I'd like to say is that even though the present FCC Commission has five members that are appointed by President Nixon and before his term is out they will probably have seven members at this point--the nature of things. It is my belief that when a man comes on the Federal Communications Commission or any other Commission that he tends to do that which seems to be right. Regardless of the appointed power. Obviously they were more likely following the trend of the appointed power, but I think all these men and women who are appointed to these offices as I've been able to view it and I've done considerable study of regulatory agencies in the past several years. They tend to follow their own convictions. Now, they may be good convictions or bad convictions. I have no great fear that any agency is going to be taken over by any President. That's the first point. Secondly, sometimes black people become hysterical also and rush into the so called laps of liberal whites in this country when their interests are not always identical. Now, broadcasters have enjoyed and newspapers have enjoyed, you know, privileged positions in this country. You know, good. I think the TV industry did a tremendous job in the so called civil rights revolution. Without that coverage which was not biased in favor of blacks, just gave us facts. Or as the dragnet says--they showed people getting beat down by bull whips and fire hoses on them and there was at that time some moral climate that at least didn't want to see that. And it caused two major bills that passed Congress. But that was reported news. They weren't doing it necessarily to be favorable or unfavorable. It was part of the news. It would sell. People would look and they did it. It helped black people. Without television I doubt if we would have ever had the changes that we've had. The publicity caused that through the TV medium. But the point that I say is that the broadcasters don't have any intestinal fortitude, they're not willing to fight for what they consider their rights, I couldn't be that concerned about it. I think that life is a struggle that you survive through trying to protect the interests that you think are paramount. And we have a very close relationship. I am much in favor of a free press, an untrammeled press. I don't think that if you look back in the last few years ... I mean, every

President has been dissatisfied with the press and all of them make certain efforts to try to control it. And I don't think it is the job of the press to get on a wailing wall and cry, you know, but get up and if you think you are right, say so. That's why I don't see why black folk can be so, you know, stung by this because all of our lives we've been oppressed and if we didn't fight for anything we wouldn't have anything. You're not sitting here because you are necessarily the only brilliant person that could do this, but because of the black man you've got to fight through all kinds of tricks and subterfuges and dodges and every black man and woman for that matter who has achieved any promise in this country has had to achieve it through a tremendous struggle. Now, if white folk have got to fight some, to maintain their rights, you know I'm not going to cry for them, just more power to them. I'll say to them privately and publicly--if you feel you are being threatened, then fight. And if you just roll over and play dead, then that's your problem.

BROWN: Now, speaking of struggle, a few months ago at the National Association for Broadcasters Convention, you did two things. One, you put a lot of spine into the blacks who were in that very vast audience of public television personnel and public radio personnel by giving us a sense of dignity and by saying to everybody there, black and white, that you had some reservations, strong reservations, about public television and public radio. Now where do you see public television and public radio going? In terms of satisfying the kinds of needs that the noise have in this country?

HOOKS: Well, as you know better than most people, I've done a recent change in the composition of chairmanship and presidency of many important offices in public television. And this has caused a great deal of consternation and dismay. I don't think all the facts are in yet. I'm not ready yet to become one of the alarmists at this point. I simply note that before the change took place there were no black folk involved. You know--so that I don't think we've lost anything--there were 13 top officers in that corporation, not a one of them was black. I do happen to know that today they are looking for one or two blacks, you know, to take some of those top spots. Secondly, we accuse the President of being irresponsible on the funding when the truth of the matter is that Congress could have, if they had wanted to cut loose the purse strings, given the public broadcasting--at that point in time, before President Nixon even got into office--a permanent financing system. They were prepared

to do it then, they're not prepared to do it now. The nature of politics being what it is, nobody wants to cut loose the purse strings. So I think out of the struggle some good things will happen. And thirdly, when it comes to black programming I've been very dissatisfied, not with the programs that are on, but with the lack of other programs. I think we need more because public television really ought to belong to black folk. It is the one medium where we ought to be represented. And thirdly, or fourthly, I've forgotten the points, but in employment, there are available records that indicate the record of public broadcasting is--among minorities is even worse than commercial television.

BROWN: Mr. Commissioner, on that note I'll have to interrupt you. There are many other areas and facets of your life that I do want to develop, but we didn't have time. I'd like to thank you for being our guest on BLACK JOURNAL.